

**The meaning of teacher unions in school administration.  
The Belgian case**

**Jef C. Verhoeven  
KU Leuven**

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## **1. The problem**

Trade unions are very important institutions to protect the rights of the employees in industry, administration and services and to promote democracy on the work floor. There is no doubt that trade unions had a tremendous impact on the position of employees in Belgium and we have enough reasons to contend that this is the same for the teacher unions (TU) as well. Not much research is available about the efficacy of TU in Belgium, but those available confirm that the unions had an impact on the national policy in relation to the position of teachers. Boelen (1984) shows that national teacher unions developed a striking policy to attain their aims in relation to 4 domains: 1) the adaptation of salaries of primary school and infant school teachers, 2) the rationalisation of the primary schools, 3) the realisation of the five days' school week, and 4) the statute of the personnel of the independent schools. This research has shown that the efficacy of the TUs was positively influenced by the number of members of the unions, the managerial capacities of the leaders of the unions, the democratic structure of the TUs, the relations with the government, the economic situation, the political parties represented in the government (there is more resistance if the government has a liberal faction), and the attitude of pressure groups towards the issues the TUs are fighting for (if the pressure groups support the standpoint of TUs, the policy of the last has more success).

All these issues have some meaning for the professional position of the teachers. The question is if TUs are also interested in issues of the national educational policy. Geerens (1988) made a scrutiny

of the actions of TUs in relation to the governmental proposals to extend compulsory education (until the age 16 full time and until 18 part-time). He contends that the TUs were interested in this educational policy, but it had no priority. One of the union leaders said: "We are not a pedagogical club". In the first place union leaders were interested because this proposal would create more employment in the schools, and educational motives came next. On the other hand we have to admit that TUs were not totally indifferent for educational matters, because they supported openly and positively the development of a program for pupils who had to go part-time to schools until the age of 18. Yet this research shows that the number of the members of the TUs has no particular influence on the efficacy of their policy.

Nevertheless in this context it is interesting to remind that in spite of the democratic structure of the TUs, the participation of their members in the meetings preparing this policy was rather low. In most of the meetings the same, small group of members was present.

The two projects show that the national organizations of TUs are important to defend the professional rights of their members, and for educational matters as well. Nevertheless it is obvious that it is easier to mobilize the TU members if the issue is linked to the professional position of the teachers. This mobilization is more problematic if TUs fight for educational issues in which the national leaders are not immediately interested except if this policy can improve the professional position of their members. This suggests the hypothesis that TUs are interested in school administration as far as the professional position of the members is concerned, and less if school administration is focused on educational administration.

To understand the participation of TUs in school administration it is important to know that teachers in Belgium are mainly organized in three trade unions: a Christian-Democratic (ACV), a Social-Democratic (ABVV), and a Liberal union (ACLVB). The first and the

second are the largest unions. Correct figures of the members are not available. Boelen (1984: 3, 29) mentions 100.000 members for the Christian-Democratic TU, 53.000 members for the Social-Democratic TU, and no figures for the Liberals. Yet it is known that the last union is much smaller than the others. During the last elections (1991) for the works councils and the health-and-safety councils in the independent schools the results were: of 92,401 voters 18.88% voted for the Social-Democratic TU, 71.15% for the Christian-Democratic and 6.76% for the liberal TU; 113,918 voters elected the members of the health-and-safety councils : 19.71% of them voted for a Social-Democratic delegate, 73.76% for a Christian-Democratic and 6.53% for a liberal delegate (Ministerie van Tewerkstelling en Arbeid, 1991: 68, 102).

One reason for the success of the Christian-Democratic TU is that the majority of pupils in Belgium attend christian schools and in these schools the representation of teachers is mainly -if not exclusively- in the hands of Christian-Democratic TUs. Social-Democratic and liberal TU have more influence in state, provincial and local schools.

Another important phenomenon to understand the policy of the TU is to be found in the key aims of the TUs. All TUs stress the fight for the material, moral and occupational interests of their members on the first place. The Christian-Democratic TU wants to influence also the educational evolution and the professional training of the members, and the Social-Democratic TU wants to promote the public schools. The liberal TU does not mention other than the material interests of their members (Boelen, 1984: 26, 34; NSKO, 1991: 43). Again this leads to the hypothesis that TUs will be mainly interested in school administration as far as the professional position of the members is concerned.

Not much information is available about the motivation to become a member of the TU. A survey among members of a part of the Christian-Democratic TU in 1983 shows that the majority of the members motivate their membership this way: the individual service provided by the union, solidarity, tradition and collective advantages. Asked for the main tasks of the TU they stress in order of priority: 1) protect the collective interests, 2) provide useful information to the members, 3) solve individual problems, 4) improve the quality of education, 5) training of school representatives, 6) extra advantages for the members, and 7) the organization of action to put pressure on the policy makers (Geerens, 1988: 22).

Taking into account these objectives of the TU it is not evident that local branches of TU are very interested in school administration, although it is obvious that school administration might have some influence on the professional position of teachers. In the next minutes I want **to describe to what extent local TU are interested in school administration and the strategies they use to influence school administration.** Both issues will be described as defined by the union representatives and the head of the schools.

The data were collected in 1986-1987 mainly by unstructured in-depth interviews in 12 schools in Flanders in order to get information about school administration in general. In each school several persons involved in school administration were interviewed of whom the school heads three times or more. In each school only one representative of the largest TU was interviewed. Remember that in the catholic schools of the project only one TU was represented, in the state schools three. In these school the representative of the most important TU was questioned.

Three questions will be answered: **1) what is the position of the TU in the schools and what kind of relationship do they have with**

the head?; 2) how do representatives define their duties and those of the TU? and 3) what strategies do they use to influence school administration?

## 2. The position of TUs and TUs delegates in the schools

TUs have not the same position in schools. Catholic schools only have a Christian-Democratic TU, and in state schools the three major unions are represented. In the state schools the Social-Democratic union has the largest membership. In most schools membership is more than 50%. It is hard to be more specific because most of the union representatives were very vague about the number of the members. The reason is that the public knowledge of numbers might damage the position of the TU, that is why some delegates meant that the number should be a 'TU secret'.

Moreover all delegates had the feeling that not only teachers in general, but even the members of the TUs were not very union minded.

The main **motive to be a member of the TU is personal, material interest:** i.e. some teachers believe that being a member of the TU might help if they ever have problems with their appointment, salary etc. Real involvement in trade union work is hard to find according to the delegates. An other indicator that teachers are not very much interested in the unions is the practice of the **elections of the representatives**. According to the regulations representatives should be elected by the members of the TU. In most of the schools official elections are organized, but most of the younger delegates were elected because they did not strike out their names on the list of the members of the TU who all are supposed to be candidates. As far as the older representatives are concerned, they declare that it is hard to find a colleague who want to take over the job.

According to one of the delegates another reason for union apathy is the growing number of female teachers in schools. This hypothesis however is contested by Jenny Ozga (1987) for British TU. The analysis of the representative is this:

" A part of the teachers who are not members of the union - most of them are women - thinks: 'The union will do it. Why should I become a member of the union? I get all advantages the unions have fought for'. Often I see that the husbands are employers and they are not members of a union. ... For some women is teaching extra earnings..." (G04)

Table 1. Some characteristics of the TU in the schools

Schools	Teacher Union	% of teachers in TU	Opinion of head about TU	Opinion of delegate about the attitude of the head
A	Social-Democratic (largest), Liber-al, Christian-Democrat ic	70%	positive	positive
B	3	?	positive	positive
C	3	?	positive, but TU can manipulate	positive
D	3	75%	positive	positive
E	1	50%	critical	positive and negative
F	1	50%	positive	positive
G	1	40%	critical (educational reasons)	negative
H	1	50%	critical (educational reasons)	negative
I	1	65%	positive and critical (educational reasons)	positive and negative
J	1	55%	positive	positive
K	1	20%	critical (reasons of management)	negative
L	1	40%	positive	positive

Most of the representatives are interested in the job, but not all of them prove to be able and well trained as representatives. Two delegates in the state schools (A, C) have problems to explain what the tasks of the different councils in the school are and three



had never heard about the plan to create a new council (basisoverlegcomité) in which the place of the TU was very outspoken. In school E the delegate takes all decisions of the head for granted and never checks if the rights of the personnel are violated. And in school K the representative and her colleagues are not stimulating enough to mobilize teachers to become candidates for the works council which should be elected every four years.

Scheme 1. Participation councils in state and independent schools

State schools	Independent schools
educational council: head, representatives of teachers, union representatives	works council: representatives of management, elected personnel (union members)
council of the personnel: all personnel	health-and-safety council: representatives of management, elected personnel (union members)

The legal regulations giving a voice to the TU in school matters are different in state and catholic schools. In state schools there are many **councils**. Among these councils the educational council (pedagogisch college) and the council of the personnel are the most important. Some representatives of the TU are members of the educational council and all are member of the council of the personnel (all employees of the school are members). The educational council gives advice in educational matters. The council of the personnel advises about problems in relation to the position of the personnel in the school.

In catholic schools there are two legally compulsory councils: the works council and the health-and-safety council. Originally these councils were created for industrial units, but became later also obligatory in schools. The works council has the right to advise about the organization of work, the work situation; this council may take decisions about the administration of social work; the works council

has to check if law and departmental regulations are applied and has the right to ask information about the financial situation of the school. Nevertheless many regulations (e.g. the general criteria for appointment and dismissal of the personnel) are nationally determined and are never an issue. The task of the health and safety council does not need more explanation I suppose. Each school with 100 employees is obliged to organize elections for the works council. The health and safety council is obligatory in schools with at least 50 employees.

Most catholic schools in our research, except one (L), have a teachers' council. Members are the head, elected teachers and/or delegates, and in some schools the co-ordinators. Two schools (E and K) have no works council. School E is too small and in school K no candidates were found to put on the ballot. In schools I, J and L the teachers' councils are functioning as works council. And in schools F, G and H the heads are considering teachers' councils as more important than the works council, nevertheless every month they organize meetings of the works council. Representatives of these schools admit that they really do not need these frequent meetings: ' We have in the school already enough participation councils ', they say.

We recognize two types of the relationship between heads and representatives. The **first type** is composed of the schools where heads and delegates have a **good co-operation**. The delegates are not hindered to do their job and actions (e.g. strike) are not linked with the delegate as a person. This is the case in all state schools and in catholic schools I, J and L. Schools E, G and H form the **second type**.

Here heads are **opposed to action of TUs** and certainly disagree with the strikes organized in the past. They consider the administration of personnel and finance the domain of the heads. The representatives of school G and H:

"R.:...the relationship with the head is very sensitive...

I.: Already before the strike?

R.: Before the strike it was -let me call it- reserved; although it was not personal.

I.: Reserved? From your side or his?

R.: From both sides, because we know he is not fond of the union.

I.: And you are sure that he has that opinion...?

R.: When the strike was on his first reaction was: 'Do you run after the socialists again? ...You see, this is not allowed. I hope you don't tell him. That was his reaction: Do you run after the socialists again. It's the last I would dream about (laughs). That's a typical liberal, conservative reaction. But why do they oppose the union? Don't forget that unions have attained a lot in schools. It's incredible. Think about the established appointment. They're at their wits' end what to do about it...." (G04)

"It is obvious that the heads (school F, G and H have together one works council) are opposed (that I am directly informed about the meetings of the management council)....If they are so opposed to the union than it is hard to talk with them..." (H04).

The directors of the same schools gives these reasons:

" R.: Yes, it depends on the person. I am not against the unions, but if it is a heated person who only defends standpoints which -according to my opinion, I have to admit that- are not good for the school, the educational side of the time table or the well-being of the pupils, than I am dead against that. I tell him that and I do not take into account whatever he tells me." (G012).

"I.: What is your attitude towards the union? This is a very personal question...

R.: Yes,... I don't see the use of it, neither for this school nor for other schools. If they don't like something, they can come and tell me. We will try to solve the problem.

I.: What about the strikes of...?

R.: Ho, I don't like that at all. The strikes of last year, yes... it was a holiday of two days for the pupils." (H011)

"R.: When the strike was on I said to him (representative): the only reason of the strike is to offend us. I don't need that.

I.: ...and, there was no strike?

R.: Yes, even two days...

I.: and ... do you always have problems with the same person (representative)?

R.: Yes. Always. Just before the strike he wanted to inform the teachers. He went to several classrooms and told the teachers: tomorrow you have to go on strike.

I.: The pupils were in the classroom?

R.: Yes. I told him: you have not the right to go and speak in the classrooms, unless you have my permission. And you don't ..." (H011)

School K is special. The TU has not much influence because of the apathy of the teachers for the union. There is no works council.

Although teachers do not show a lot of interest for TU and participation in works council, we wonder if this lack of interest is not influenced by the attitude and behaviour of the head. More than once the head shows a very critical attitude towards the TU, according to the representatives.

"I.: How is your relationship with the head?

R.: (very long pause)

I.: Or how is the relationship of the union with the head?

R.: I think that everything in this school is organized according  
to the law; it can't be denied.

I.: Are there meetings of...?

R.: Of course, there are meetings of the health and safety  
council. It's true. But...

I.: Are there other contacts with the head?

R.: Of the teachers or of the union?

I.: Of the union.

R.: No, not at all. Moreover, this year I was not informed about  
the regional meeting..." (K04)

Also school F is peculiar. The head has a good relationship with the delegate, but he refuses to pay much attention to the works council. This is probably the consequence of the influence of his colleagues of the schools G and H, who belong to the same schools group and who are strongly opposed to the unions.

### **3. The duties of local TU and their delegates**

Because of the structural differences of state schools and catholic schools and the limitations of this contribution the following analysis will be confined to 4 Catholic schools. All of them got the label 'participatory decision-making' on the basis of an extensive analysis of 8 domains of decision-making, which I cannot describe in a few words (Devos e.a. 1989: 336). The basic features of the decision-making process in these schools are: 1) the decisions are taken together by head and (representatives of) teachers; 2) the communication is top-bottom and vice versa, and happens frequently; and 3) teachers can rely on formal structures of participation to express their opinions.

What else in these schools might be important to understand the union work? In two schools, namely **G and H**, the heads are opposed to the unions in general and to some actions of the unions (strikes) in particular. In their opinion they damage the educational climate of the schools. These schools have the two legal councils and organize meetings regularly. But the items discussed in these legal councils have already been part of formal consultation in the local school councils. Both schools are situated in a rural area and expanded between 1982 and 1987 25%. School G (400-500 pupils) organizes the 4 last years of general academic education; school H (400-500 pupils) has the same structure but is a technical and vocational school. The statutory authority of both schools is a congregation with a special attention for underprivileged youngsters. The heads belong to this congregation. All teachers are lay persons.

The head of school **K** (1,100-1,200 pupils) says no to be an opponent of the union (he himself is a member of the union), but this is denied by the representative. The head created a consultation structure of which the members are elected by the teachers without any interference of the union. Consequently teachers are no longer interested in the works council, though teachers elect the health- and-safety council.

The statutory authority is a nuns' congregation, but the head of the school is a male, lay person. All teachers, except a few, are lay persons. In this school general academic, technical and vocational courses are offered starting from the 1st to the sixth form. The last years (1982-1987) the number of pupils in this urban school expanded with more than 25%. This school has a general educational plan which is the result of a long discussion between teachers and head. Our field work has shown that this educational plan was the basis of the school administration.

**School J** (1,000-1,100 pupils) has a health and safety council and the teachers' council fulfils the duties of the works council.

The union is considered by teachers and head to be a reliable partner in administration. This is an urban, technical and vocational school, offering the two upper stages (4 years) of secondary education. The number of pupils diminished between 5 and 15% in five years (1982-1987).

The director is a priest and the statutory authority is the diocese, but all teachers are lay persons. This school has no general educational plan to guide the school administration. We can conclude that the four schools have a high position in participatory decision-making, but they differ a lot as far as the participation of the union in decision-making in the school is concerned: in school K the TU does not participate at all in the works council; in the schools G and H participation of the unions is officially recognized, but has no influence; in school J no works council is elected, but the TU participates a lot in decision-making in the school.

What are the duties of the representatives and the unions in these schools. Representatives have a lot of duties. These are the main categories:

- 1) school union work: contact with and providing help for teachers; be a mediator between the head and the teachers; the organization of strikes (most of the strikes are against the national educational policy and not against the school heads); the organization of the elections of the union representatives and the legal councils; participation in local and/or legal councils;
- 2) sign the official forms, e.g. the decision about the criteria on the use of the overall number of periods per teacher;
- 3) relations with the national union: provide information of the situation of the union and the teachers in the school;
- 4) relations with the ministry of education to solve salary problems of teachers;
- 5) participation in the regional councils for redeployment of teachers (only a few represent their colleagues in this council).

Answering all these obligations is time consuming and representatives complain about the lack of time and their technical inability to face all problems. In spite of the training organized by the national union they have not enough information to solve all problems. Schools are flooded by national prescriptions and make school administration very complicated. Representatives have to study all this information and have no time enough to do it. For this reason heads can become better informed opponents. Representatives have one big advantage: they can rely on professional help of the national union, e.g. if they meet complicated legal problems union lawyers can be asked for advice..

One of the representatives (in school H) describes his tasks, his successes and his disappointments this way:

" R.: ...I can't advise teachers as I want. Why? Because I don't have one hour off to break in these matters. I got the data and what I read I know and ... discuss it. But you got ten of these things. And if you want to become familiar with these problems you should work on it full time. I can imagine that the secretary (of the head) can do it. He can spend all day studying these problems. If I want to know something I go to him... There are a lot of problems and the teachers come to me. I try to solve them. I have contacts with the office of the salaries, ask accounts, have contacts with the ministry,..." (H04)

Although the union in school K can hardly survive, the representative keeps doing his job, but restricts it to personal help to teachers and the fulfilment of some official obligations:

" R.:... When I have problems I call the provincial union representative and I or the teachers receive the



information. ... And you have to be well informed in all the regulations as far as the personnel is concerned. This is a difficult job, certainly in a big school like this, where a lot of problems may emerge... My task is to pass on questions of the members to the provincial secretariat (of the union) and they send the answer to me or the member. Another task is to put my signature as a representative on official papers. I still sign these forms because nobody else wants to take my position as a representative and it is one of the tasks of the representative to sign these..." (K04)

The last 10 years the declining birth rate created a special problem for the unions: the redeployment of established teachers. The solution given by the government, namely regional councils of heads and union representatives to decide to what school an established teacher who lost his or her position or a part of it should go to teach, is in general accepted by the unions as the best solution for the teachers, although they see a lot of problems for teachers and schools.

Indeed, sometimes teachers have to teach in many schools and because of that, cannot build up a good pedagogical relationship with the pupils and loose contact with colleagues. Heads are opposed because sometimes they have to accept teachers they did not want. Heads want to be free to recruit the teachers they prefer. Not only heads complain about this policy, but local unions as well, because they want to favour the local members as well. To support their representatives national unions organized meetings to teach tricks in order to escape the problem of redeployment:

" R.: ... We had some meetings (of the regional union) where we were taught some tricks to escape the obligations of redeployment. Of course, this is very delicate because all these representatives belong to a particular school

with its own customs and habits. And we can't tell everything about our own school." (G04)

School representatives are taught how to protect the local school and local members and make schools rivals as far as redeployment is concerned. Nevertheless this does not split the national union because the problem is only the concern of a small group of teachers.

#### **4. How is school administration influenced by the TUs?**

TUs are not directly interested in educational matters, but care about the professional position of their members. Indirectly of course they touch educational matters as well. If teachers have no complaints about their working conditions, it may have some influence on their teaching behaviour. Recently TUs got more direct influence on school administration. Departmental regulations prescribe that the criteria to use the overall number of periods per teacher should be determined by the head after consultation of the teachers. This number of periods per teacher has to be used to organize the class periods according to the curriculum, but parts of it could be spent for remediation and reorientation of pupils, training of teachers, class council and class direction, etc. (Devos e.a., 1987: 216). In independent schools agreements were made between the TU and the statutory authorities to consult the teachers in the works council and if there is not one the union representatives are consulted. Although the works council has no decision-making power, these advises may have some influence on school administration.

Originally the works council was created for industrial and commercial units, but since 1975 (Devos e.a., 1987: 94) works councils should also be elected in schools. Although TUs saw this as a positive development for the protection of their members, they admit that the situation in schools is in some respects different from the situation

in production units. In spite of these doubts all TU have tried to organize works councils in all schools with at least 100 employees.

Heads had to accept this development and - as mentioned in table 1 - most of them are positive about the action of TUs, except four. For the opponents the works council was a threat for the independence of the head and the maintenance of the educational mission of the school.

They accept the union work as far as it is restricted to the protection of the professional situation of the teachers, but despise all actions - mainly strikes -which might disrupt the educational work of the schools.

How did the **heads of the schools G, H, and K react against this unwanted influence of the TUs?** In **school K** a teachers' council was created in which 12 teachers and educational assistants were elected, representing all sections of the school. Teachers could really participate in the decision-making process, although the final decision was in the hands of the head. The local union, because of its weak position in the school, could not offer an alternative and no candidates could be found for the establishment of the works council. However the consultation of all the teachers concerning the use of the overall number of periods per teacher is so well organized that the union representative could not see a reason to refuse his signature on the official form.

In **schools G and H** formal elections for the works council are held and every month meetings are organized. In addition to the works council there is a teachers' council in which the same problems are discussed. In this council a majority of teachers is elected and union representatives may participate as observers. Although the heads play the game according to the rules other decisions than those of the teachers' council make no chance in the works council. Other strategies of the heads to reduce the influence of the representatives is according to the last the production of an overloaded agenda for

the meetings, the announcement of the reports of a meeting on a billboard to make a careful analysis of the decisions difficult and the accidental neglect to inform representatives about the regional meeting for redeployment. The functioning of both councils gives the teachers the feeling to participate in the school administration, while the union members in the works council have the impression only to confirm what is decided before. For the representatives it is obvious that the heads do not take the works council seriously.

The relationship between the TU and the head in **school J** is totally different from former schools. The head is very union minded and has made an agreement with the union to consider the 'teachers' council' as the works council. The teachers' council is composed of elected teachers, the co-ordinators, the head, and the chairperson is elected among the teachers. The union representative is present as an observer. The head describes the position of this council:

"R.: We apply all legal regulations and regulations prescribed by the NSKO (National Secretariat of the Catholic Schools) in relation to the works council. But we made agreements with the unions about the organization of the elections. We give the union the list of the names of the teachers. But finally the union declares that the candidates - and they call them by name - withdraw from the list of candidates. This happens precisely because we have a teachers' council which cares about the problems of the personnel. Finally elections for the works council are not organized." (J011)

The representative confirms this procedure:

"R.: The official regulations and prescriptions of the NSKO in relation to the elections of the works council are applied.

It means, the normal procedure of the elections is started, also for the health and safety council. But the procedure for the works council will be stopped at the moment that it is obvious that there is no competition of other unions in the election. All candidates for the works council decline to stand as a candidate. At the moment I cannot tell what is going to happen in the next elections. First I have to bring the representatives together and ask them: 'Do you agree that we continue the teachers' council and do not start a works council?'" (J04)

According to the representative this structure has a lot of advantages for the union:

" R.: ...Here we had a teachers' council before the works council was obligatory. Then we wondered: what is the most useful for the union: the works council or the teachers' council? We knew that non-members of the union would also belong to the teachers' council. Nevertheless our experience with this council is very positive... It would be illogical, at least I find it illogical, ... and the other representatives agree... that if we have a works council and a teachers' council together, the first should only repeat what already was discussed in the management council. The works council would have one advantage: some of the decisions should be legal. But we prefer for instance that we know all about the finances of the school. E.g. when they speak about cashbox A, B, and C... and cashbox C is always easy money, then.... If we had a works council we would never know anything about cashbox C. Now we know that if the school (technical) produced something and they made some profit, we all know about this. Or if the school organized a tombola. All these things would

be hidden for the works council..." (J04)

The strategy of the heads in schools G, H and K to reduce the influence of the TUs was creating a strong consultation council to give the teachers the feeling they really care about the participation of the teachers in educational matters. All union issues should be refused in the discussions in the councils. The consequence is that there is a continuous, covert conflict between the union representatives and the heads in schools G and H. In school K it is hard to speak of a conflict: the representative shows disappointment about the weak position of the union and the apathy of his colleagues.

Even after the help of the national union to motivate teachers to pay more attention for union work, the attitude towards the union did not change.

The strategy of the head of **school J** was rather similar, but he was not opposed to the unions. He used legal procedures to keep the local consultation structure. This was possible because the representative saw an advantage in his position as an observer in the teachers' council. Indeed, the representative can react as a union representative because he did not take part in the formal decision-making. If necessary he can fight the decisions and start union action. It never came to open conflicts, because head and representative very often have informal meetings to solve the problems.

What are the **strategies of the representatives** to have influence on school administration?

In **school K** the representative does not really offer answers to expand the influence of the union. Once she invited representatives of the national union to come and motivate the teachers to participate in union work. The result was very disappointing. In this context it is interesting to tell that once the tape recorder

was put off, she told that one of her colleagues was advised by the head not to be a candidate in the next elections for union representatives and she declared that she wanted to resign as well.

Union work in this school is limited to solve personal problems of teachers in relation to their statute and salary.

The relationship in **school J** between the TU and the head is totally different. Reciprocal understanding and cooperation seem to be the main characteristics of the this relationship. The representative tries to have influence on school administration by using mainly four strategies:

1) he is a participant in the teachers' council without being a member;

" R.: There was already a teachers' council. This council is elected and is composed of several teachers. This council elects the chairperson and invites the head and his collaborators to the meetings. Originally I was elected. But a reaction came from the union: 'You may not accept that position. You have to demand a clause in which is said that you are invited to the meeting, but that you have no right to vote'. Now I am always invited and I am free to do what I want with the decisions..." (J04)

2) frequent personal, formal and informal contacts with the head and other persons in charge of the organization of work in the school;

" R.: At least I have three contacts a week with the head. And this varies from three average contacts of ten minutes to... meetings of three hours..." (J04)

" R.: ... If teachers have complaints about their salary e.g. then they go to the chief representative, i.e. they come to me. I go and talk with the secretary of the head who

is responsible for this item. If we don't find a solution, then I go to the union..." (J04)

" R.: ... We wait until teachers have complaints about the organization of the turns of supervision. If they have complaints and we think they are legitimate, we go and talk with the person who made that schedule..." (J04)

" R.: If we have a vacancy we invite all applicants for a formal talk. We want to know the human side of the person. We do not assess the pedagogical qualities. We form a selection committee of five: a member of the direction committee, a member of the teachers' council, the secretary of the head, a teacher who teaches the same subject and the senior representative. They have a talk with the applicants and send their decision to the direction committee..." (J04)

3) a flexible interpretation of the statute of the representative;

" R.: We pay attention to the official regulations concerning the position of the representative, but the way we act is nowhere prescribed. We receive instructions of the national union, but the national union is very permissive. The union prefers a delegation that can work, instead of a delegation functioning according to the book,..." (J04)

" R.: You can go to the head and say: 'We have a statute (of representative) and we want it applied literally'. Then the head has the right to interpret that statute from his own standpoint..." (J04)



" R.: I give an example. In the statute of the representative is mentioned that he may collaborate to make the timetable for classes and supervisions. I don't do that. But if colleagues approach me and tell me that they got an 'inhuman' timetable, I go and talk with the head and ask about the purpose of that timetable. And mostly we find a solution for the problem." (J04)

and 4) contact with the statutory authority.

" R.: Somebody was declared illegally absent. But if a teacher is declared illegally absent, that might have very heavy consequences. For instance, the established appointment and all the rights related to it can be cancelled. This happened in this school. The head and the statutory authority wanted to cancel an appointment of a teacher without being aware of the heavy consequences. On that moment I felt obliged to ask for a meeting with the head and the statutory authority and I asked them: 'Are you really aware about the consequences of this measure?'... And they said: ' Not at all. That was not our purpose'. They have canceled their decision. They put a note in his file with some remarks ... and later that note could be destroyed when the teacher had proved not to make the same mistake." (J04)

In the **schools G and H** the representatives have a weak position and are confronted with a critical attitude of the heads. The heads see the TUs as a threat of their independence and a danger for the educational culture of the schools. This last attitude is reinforced by former strikes against the austerity policy of the minister of education. Representatives discussed the strikes in the classroom

with teachers in front of the children. In the eyes of the heads this was a fundamental mistake in an educational relationship. All this makes it very hard for the representatives to get any credit of the heads. Both felt they were not taken seriously by the heads. The representative of school H is convinced that he has no influence on school administration at all, because he is no member of any council. The strenght of the heads is also confirmed by the stabilization of the employment of teachers in a time of austerity. In this peculiar situation the strategies to influence school administration indirectly can be described in these categories:

1) informal contact with persons in charge of parts of school administration;

" R.: ... He (the secretary of the head) knows that I want to hear about these things (the use of the overall number of periods per teacher). And I ask that information and he gives it to me. If I have remarks on this information, he explains to me why it is like that. Indeed we have a good relationship and ... you have to be very careful. Actually the role of the representative is to check if everything is in function of employment, division of labour of the teachers... But never give the others the feeling that you keep a close eye on them." (G04)

" R.: ... And I presume that the secretary (of the head) can give that information, because he is free to spend all the time on these things.... I have contact with the office of salaries as well... I can ask accounts..." (H04)

2) participation in councils as an observer and controle of the decisions;

" R.: Yes, and I'm present on the meetings of the different councils in order to know into what direction the general administration is going. I care about all things in relation to the division of work of the teachers. For instance, during Christmas holidays I take the timetables of all teachers home. I check for all of them the amount of half days off. This year I will compare the amount of half days off each had last year with the amount every teacher has this year. Next year I will do the same and make a statistic. That makes it possible to control if every teacher is treated equally..." (G04)

" I. : You are there (on the meeting of the teachers' council) present as a participant or as a listener?

R. : As a listener... I am almost always present. Yet I have no right to vote. But that's no problem.... They never vote. Nevertheless I can interfere; I have the right to speak in that meeting..." (H04)

3) critical remarks on parts of the school administration;

" R. : Yes, I have to sign the forms about the use of the overall number of periods per teacher which will be sent to Brussels. You see, these decisions must be officially confirmed by the ministry. And I say already several years - o yes, I understand why they do it that way - : 'Already in May or June you should ask the teachers on a general meeting: what are you going to do with the available periods per teacher'. Now everything is organized (by the top of the school) and then they say, laughing : 'Look, we did it this way... and now you know'. That's what they call the consultation of the teachers. You see, this doesn't happen seriously..." (G04)

4) formal contact with head;

" R. : Yes, I am used to discuss with the head once a year the purposes of the union.

I. : When does it happen?

R. : Usually at the end of the year... very seldom at the beginning of the year..." (G04)

5) contact with the statutory authority;

" R. : We (the representatives) went with three cars to the statutory authority in X and have defended our case. Once we have won, the other time we lost. Yes, that's life. It was a representative who defended the case because they are legally protected. When I have to speak to them I always start saying: 'What I am going to tell now, I do it as a representative. I wouldn't like you to rub my nose in it later'." (G04)

The representative of school H did not offer many strategies to promote the position of the representative in school administration.

His main message was that the head did not trust him because he was a representative. He hoped that the situation would change. Although he contended that the head was a 'good man', he accused him of covert actions, although he never provided any evidence. Was this because of fear? More than once his answers suggested this. In this school the representative had no influence at all, neither on appointment or dismissal of teachers (except in one rare case), neither on the criteria for the use of the overall number of periods per teacher.

## **5. Conclusion**

Just like other unions national TUs have always been interested in the protection of the material and legal well-being of their members. This was the same for the local unions in the schools. Local unions were not very much interested in educational matters, except if they had influence on the labour organization and labour security of their members. Local unions could partly mobilize their members, even to go on strike. But all the strikes were national strikes, not against the local head, but against the national government who was threatening to diminish the employment in schools and keeping salaries of teachers pretty low. General employment principles and salaries are the domain of the government, not of the head. Moreover our field work has shown that all heads did all they could to keep employment as high as possible (Devos, 1989: 67-69). In spite of this supportive behaviour of heads towards the aims of the TUs, the relationship between unions and heads was not everywhere very friendly. The reason is that some heads consider unions to be a threat of their autonomy and/or a threat of the educational calling of a school.

To describe the duties and the strategies of the TUs and the representatives, we choose the data of four schools with a high degree of participatory decision-making but with a very different level of participation of the TU in the decision-making of the school. The representative of school K did not participate in decision-making at all and no works council was elected. The representatives of schools G and H got an elected works council but were almost powerless; their influence in school administration was indirect and weak. Although school J had no official works council, the representative could influence school administration a lot, e.g. appointments, timetables, etc. It is obvious that the participation of TUs in school administration is not taken for granted by heads. And even the active representatives pay much more attention to the protection of the rights of their members than to the participation in school administration. What they consider to be their duties is more connected with the

protection of the position of teachers than with school administration in general. School administration is not the first interest of TUs.

Another conclusion we can draw from these data is that representatives' strategies do not differ very much between schools where unions have a comfortable position and schools where unions are disliked by the head. In both types of schools there is formal contact with the head, informal contact with persons who are in charge of parts of the organization of the work of teachers and formal contact with the statutory authority. In both types of schools representatives have formal contact with the head, but in the union minded school much more. In the last school the representative has also more frequently informal contacts with the head and does not demand a strict recognition of the rights of the union. Moreover his informal participation in the teachers' council gives the opportunity to interfere in decision-making. It is obvious that heads, in spite of all forms of participation, are still very powerful in school administration. But on the other hand the case of school J has shown that TUs might have some influence in school administration if representatives play the game carefully.

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